



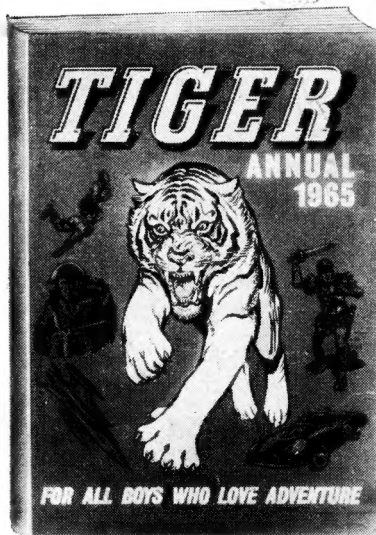
PACIFIC PATROL



The huge,
slow-moving
flying-boats
seemed to be
easy targets,
but...!

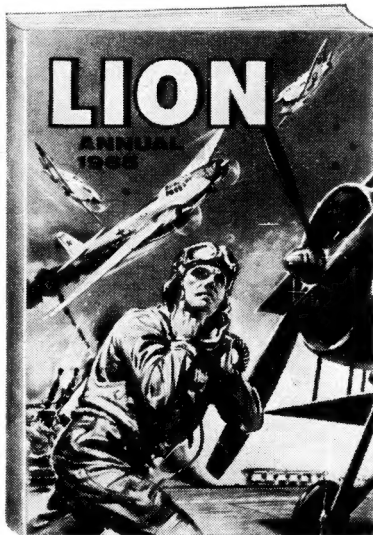
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**LION
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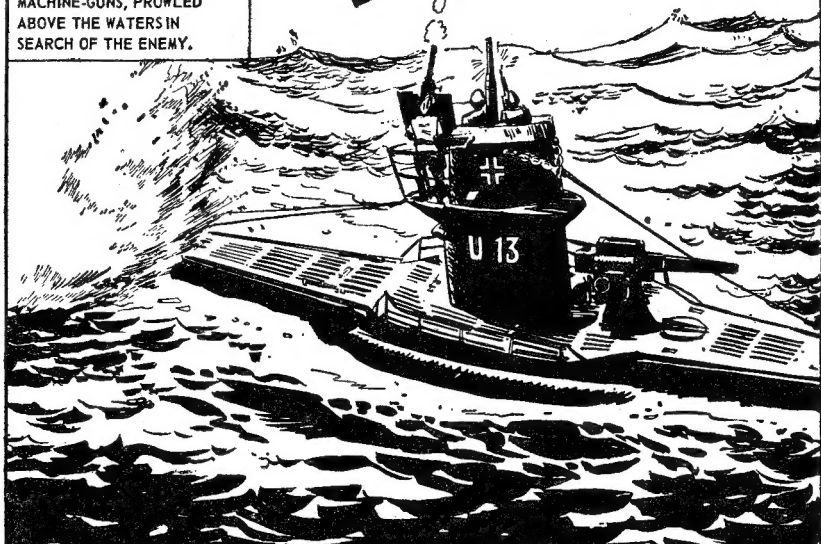
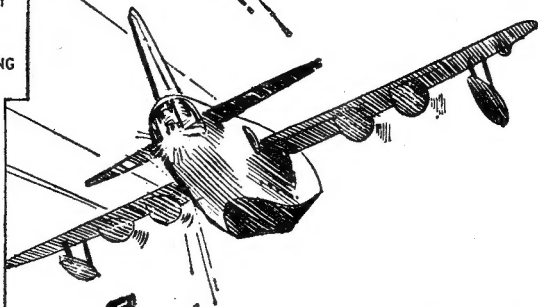
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PACIFIC PATROL

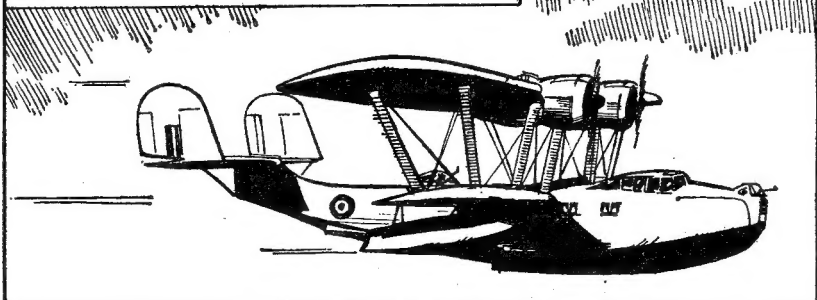
DURING WORLD WAR 2, PACKS OF SUBMARINES WERE SENT OUT BY GERMANY TO PREVENT VITAL SUPPLIES REACHING BRITAIN FROM OVERSEAS. SHIPS CROSSING THE MIGHTY OCEANS FACED DESTRUCTION FROM TORPEDO ATTACKS. BUT THE U-BOATS THEMSELVES ALSO FACED DEADLY PERIL - DEADLY PERIL FROM THE COASTAL COMMAND AIRCRAFT OF THE ROYAL AIR FORCE. HUGE FLYING-BOATS, LADEN WITH BOMBS OR DEPTH CHARGES, AND ARMED WITH MACHINE-GUNS, PROWLED ABOVE THE WATERS IN SEARCH OF THE ENEMY.



BIG, HEAVY AND SLOW THOUGH THEY WERE, THE SUNDERLANDS DID GREAT WORK IN HUNTING DOWN THE U-BOATS. BUT THE JOB REQUIRED SKILL, COURAGE AND ... PATIENCE.

CHAPTER 1. Engine Ablaze!

THE SOUTH PACIFIC IN 1942. AN OLD SARO 'LONDON' FLYING-BOAT CRUISED STEADILY OVER THE SPARKLING BLUE WATER.



THE JAPANESE HORDES HAD SWEEPED ACROSS THE PACIFIC, AND AUSTRALIA QUICKLY TOOK UP THE CHALLENGE. UNFORTUNATELY HER MARITIME PATROL SQUADRONS WERE URGENTLY IN NEED OF MODERN AIRCRAFT.

SECOND PILOT OF THE LONDON WAS FLYING OFFICER RICKY BELL. AT TWENTY-TWO HE WAS ALREADY A VETERAN OF MANY PATROLS OVER THE COLD, GREY NORTH ATLANTIC.



THE REASON FOR RICKY BELL BEING SO FAR FROM HOME WAS THAT HE HAD BEEN SENT TO AUSTRALIA TO ARRANGE THE TRANSFER OF R.A.A.F. SQUADRONS TO ENGLAND, TO REINFORCE A HARD-PRESSED COASTAL COMMAND. WITH MANPOWER STRETCHED TO THE LIMIT, ONLY A JUNIOR COULD BE SPARED FOR THE JOB.

ALSO, RICKY WAS EXPECTED TO GIVE THE AUSTRALIANS SOME INSTRUCTION IN R.A.F. SUB-HUNTING TECHNIQUES. NOT AN EASY TASK WITH THE INDEPENDENT TYPES 'DOWN UNDER'.

RIGHT, WE'RE IN OUR PATROL AREA. BEGIN THE SQUARE SEARCH.

OH HECK, CLANGER, HAVE WE GOT TO GO THROUGH THAT ROUTINE AGAIN? LET'S JUST HAVE A QUIET POKE AROUND. WE MIGHT CATCH A SUBMARINE!

RICKY'S LIPS TIGHTENED. HE DETESTED THE NICKNAME THE AUSSIES HAD GIVEN HIM. IN FACT, THEIR WHOLE ATTITUDE JARRED HIS CRANWELL-TRAINED SENSIBILITIES.

FLIGHT-LIEUTENANT KEENAN, SIR, I'D BE OBLIGED IF YOU DIDN'T ADDRESS ME BY THAT STUPID NICKNAME.

AH, COME OFF YOUR HIGH HORSE, COBBER. CALL ME DAVE, LIKE ALL THE LADS DO.

RICKY SIGHED AND GAVE UP. HE TURNED HIS ATTENTION TO THE GUNNERS, WHO WERE LOUNGING EASILY IN THEIR SEATS, ENJOYING THE SUN.

EACH MAN SHOULD SEARCH HIS SECTION OF SEA METHODICALLY, A SMALL PART AT A TIME. THAT WAY YOU WON'T MISS ANYTHING. A PERISCOPE ONLY MAKES A SMALL WAVE —

YOU TOLD US ALL THIS YESTERDAY. WE'VE GOT OUR EYES PEELED, DON'T WORRY.

RICKY'S LONG-SUFFERING PATIENCE GAVE OUT. TRY AS HE MIGHT, HE COULD NOT GET THESE HAPPY-GO-LUCKY CHARACTERS TO TOE THE LINE.

FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE!
HOW CAN WE HUNT SUBMARINES
IF WE DON'T WORK TO
A SYSTEM?

MAYBE THAT'S
WHY WE'VE NOT SEEN ONE!
TOO MUCH SYSTEM! THE JAPS
KNOW OUR TIMETABLE, AND
DUCK UNDER UNTIL
WE GO BY.

THE ARGUMENT WAS CUT SHORT BY A
CRY FROM THE REAR GUNNER.

TWO PLANES NINE
O'CLOCK HIGH! THEY'RE
TURNING THIS WAY. HECK,
THEY'RE JAPS - ZEROS!

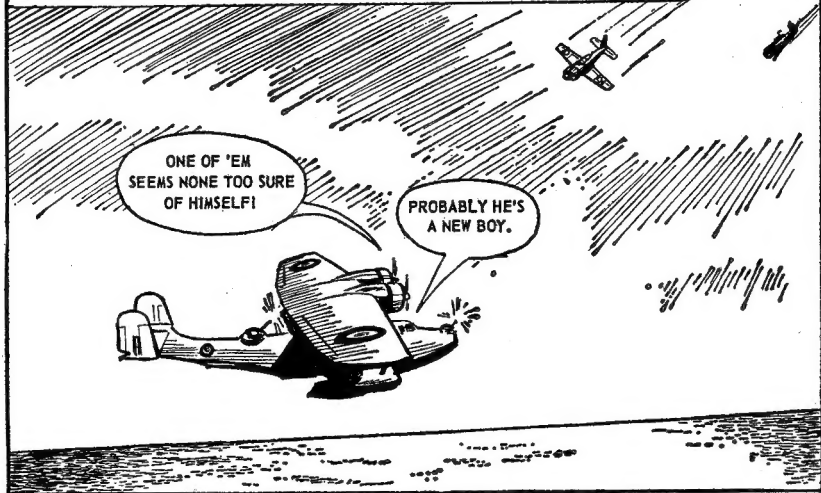
ACTION AT
LAST, CLANGER! NOW
WE CAN REALLY GET
STUCK IN.

IN THIS BOX KITE?
RUN FOR IT, MAN, OR
THEY'LL SLAUGHTER US!

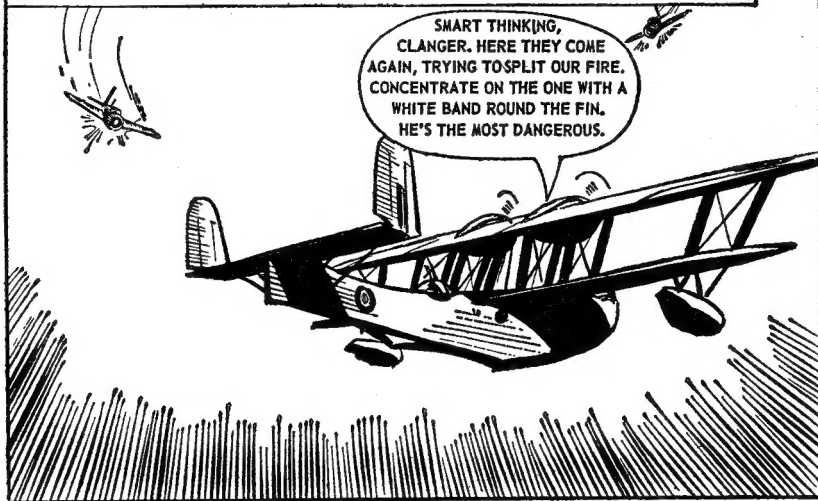
BUT THE AUSTRALIANS' BLOOD WAS UP. IGNORING RICKY, KEENAN TURNED THE FLYING-BOT TO MEET THE FIGHTERS. EAGERLY THE GUNNERS OPENED FIRE.

HOLD IT, YOU
NITWITS! YOU'LL NEVER HIT
THEM AT THIS RANGE. SHOOT
WHEN YOU SEE THE WHITES
OF THEIR EYES!

RICKY COULD AGREE WITH KEENAN'S ADVICE, FOR THE LONDON'S ARMAMENT CONSISTED MERELY OF THREE ANCIENT LEWIS GUNS, OF VERY DOUBTFUL ACCURACY.

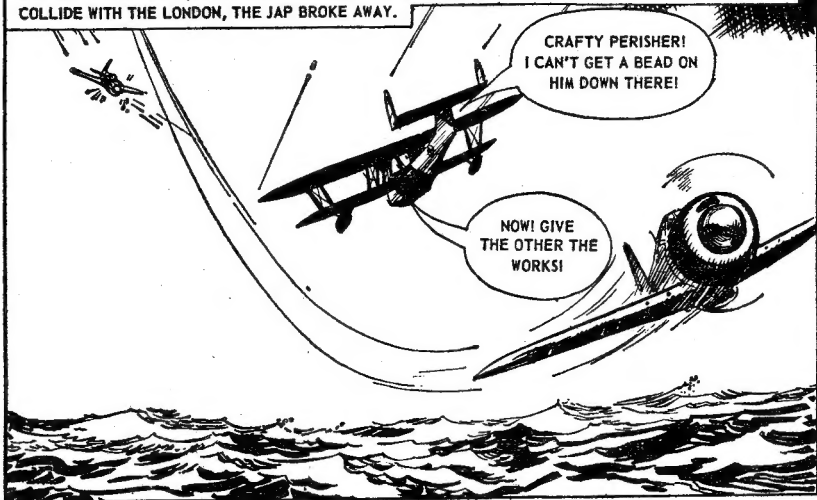


THE PRESENCE OF THE ZEROS MEANT THERE WAS A JAPANESE AIRCRAFT CARRIER IN THE AREA. ON RICKY'S INSTRUCTIONS THE WIRELESS OPERATOR SENT A REPORT TO BASE. DAVE KEENAN NODDED.

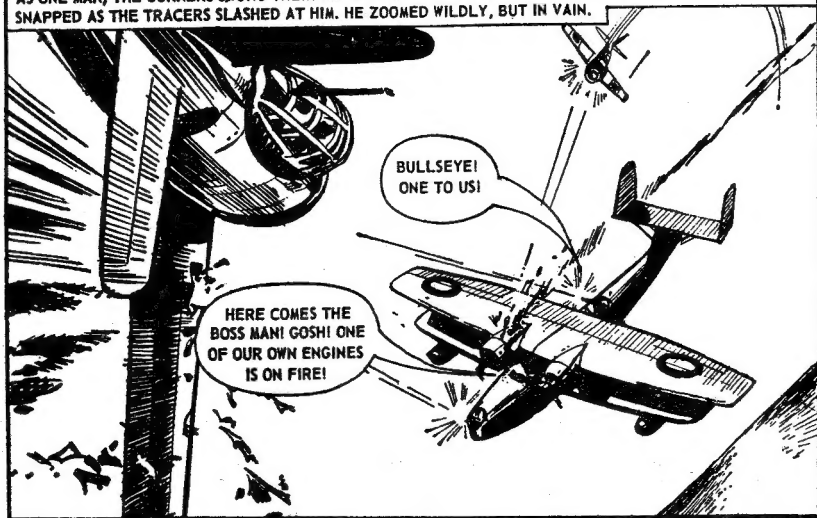


Pacific Patrol

IGNORING THE MURDEROUS CROSSFIRE, THE LEAD ZERO BORED IN, GUNS BLAZING. SHELLS SMASHED INTO THE OLD FLYING-BOAT, SETTING HER BUCKING AND SHUDDERING. WHEN IT SEEMED HE MIGHT COLLIDE WITH THE LONDON, THE JAP BROKE AWAY.

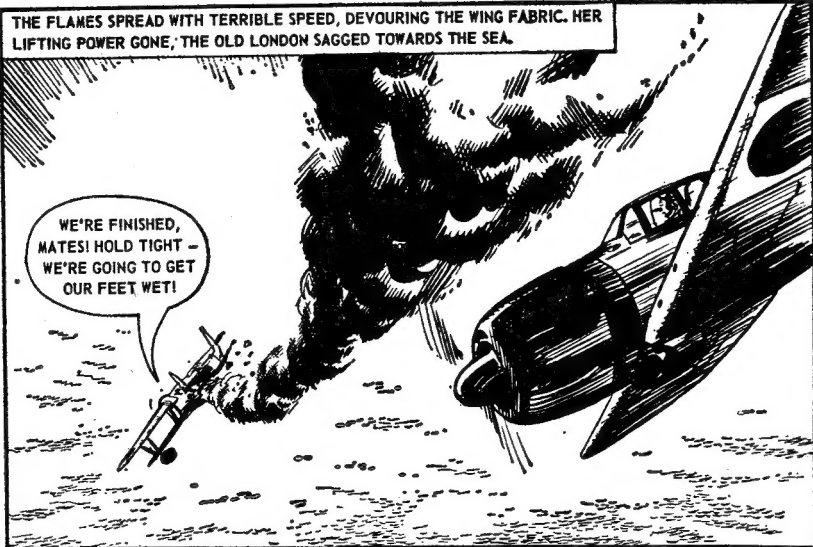


AS ONE MAN, THE GUNNERS SWUNG THEIR LEWISES ON TO THE NEW TARGET. THE YOUNG JAP PILOT'S NERVE SNAPPED AS THE TRACERS SLASHED AT HIM. HE ZOOMED WILDLY, BUT IN VAIN.



THE FLAMES SPREAD WITH TERRIBLE SPEED, DEVOURING THE WING FABRIC. HER LIFTING POWER GONE, THE OLD LONDON SAGGED TOWARDS THE SEA.


WE'RE FINISHED,
MATES! HOLD TIGHT -
WE'RE GOING TO GET
OUR FEET WET!



WITH A MIGHTY SPLASH, THE LONDON HIT THE WATER. THE FORCE OF THE IMPACT SPLIT THE HULL IN A DOZEN PLACES.

PERHAPS THAT'LL
PUT THE FIRE OUT.

NO SUCH LUCK.
EVERYBODY OVER THE SIDE
- QUICK!



RICKY DREW BACK, WAITING FOR KEENAN TO MOVE.

CAPTAIN'S THE
LAST TO LEAVE. TRADITION,
Y'KNOW. INTO THE DRINK - THAT'S
AN ORDER! YOU TOO, SPARKS.

AFTER YOU,
SIR.

I'M JUST
SIGNALLING OUR
POSITION,
SKIPPER.

AN ORDER FROM A SENIOR WAS TO BE OBEYED WITHOUT QUESTION. RICKY BELL HAD HAD THAT HAMMERED INTO HIM. SO THROUGH THE HATCH HE WENT AND INTO THE SEA.

HERE COMES THAT
YELLOW SWAB AGAIN! JUMP
FOR IT, DAVE!

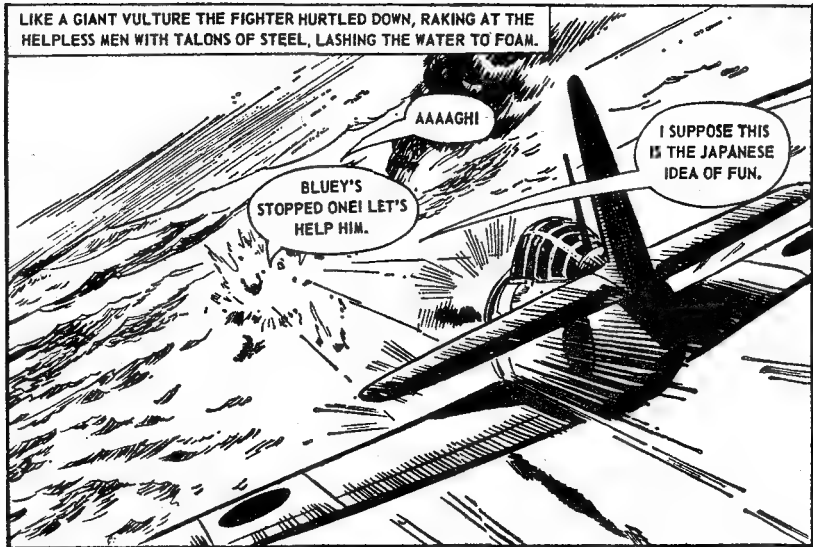
THE CRY WAS LOST IN THE CHATTER OF THE ZERO'S GUNS. INCENDIARY BULLETS RIPPED OPEN THE FLYING-BOAT'S PETROL TANKS AND —



RICKY BELL SWAM CLEAR BUT KEENAN WAS UNLUCKY.



LIKE A GIANT VULTURE THE FIGHTER HURTLIED DOWN, RAKING AT THE HELPLESS MEN WITH TALONS OF STEEL, LASHING THE WATER TO FOAM.



AT LAST THE ZERO PILOT TIRED OF HIS GHASTLY SPORT AND MADE OFF, LEAVING THE SURVIVORS TO THEIR FATE.

WE MUST KEEP TOGETHER. THERE'S A CHANCE SOMEBODY HEARD OUR SIGNALS. YOU'RE WOUNDED, TOO.

JUST A SCRATCH. GIVE US A HAND WITH BLUEY.

THEIR DINGHY HAD GONE DOWN WITH THE LONDON, SO THEY HAD ONLY THEIR LIFE JACKETS. NOW A NEW HORROR APPEARED ... SHARKS!

THE BLOOD FROM THE WOUNDS HAS ATTRACTED THEM. THEY CAN SMELL IT MILES OFF.

SHOUT! SPLASH THE WATER! DRIVE THEM OFF.

THEY BEAT THE WATER, AND YELLED AT THE TOPS OF THEIR VOICES. STARTLED BY THE DIN, THE TIGERS OF THE SEA MADE OFF.

THAT'S GOT RID OF THEM.

THEY'LL BE BACK. THEY KNOW WE'LL SOON START GETTING WEAK. PHEW - THIS SUN!

AS THE BLINDING SUN BEAT DOWN PITILESSLY, THE WOUNDED MIDSHIPS GUNNER BECAME DELIRIOUS. HE BABBLLED ENDLESSLY WHILE THE HOURS WENT BY. AND ALWAYS THE SHARKS CIRCLED, WAITING. SUDDENLY -

A PLANE! I CAN
HEAR A PLANE! THEY'VE
COME TO FIND US.

NOW
HE'S HEARING
THINGS.

QUIET A MINUTE. HE'S
RIGHT - THERE IS A PLANE
ABOUT, OR I'M HEARING
THINGS TOO.

THEY ALL LISTENED, HOPING AGAINST HOPE. SURE ENOUGH,
FROM THE SKY CAME THE STEADY BEAT OF AERO ENGINES.

THERE IT IS -
THANK THE STARS!

I DON'T KNOW
THE TYPE. IT MIGHT
BE A JAP.

HE'S SEEN US! HE'S
TURNING THIS
WAY!

THEIR FEARS PROVED GROUNDLESS. THE MACHINE WAS A DORNIER FLYING-BOAT, A TYPE EXPORTED FROM GERMANY TO SEVERAL COUNTRIES BEFORE THE WAR. THIS ONE CARRIED DUTCH MARKINGS. GRACEFULLY IT ALIGHTED NEAR THEM.



THE DUTCH AIRCRAFT HAD HEARD THE S.O.S., AND HAD COME TO INVESTIGATE. THE WOUNDED MEN WERE MADE COMFORTABLE, AND ALL WERE GIVEN WATER.



CHAPTER 2. The Avengers

DURING THE FLIGHT, RICKY CHATTED WITH ENSIGN BRENKE, WHO WAS NAVIGATOR OF THE DORNIER. HE LEARNED THAT IT WAS BUT A MATTER OF TIME BEFORE THE JAPANESE INVADED THE DUTCH ISLAND. AND WHEN THE PLANE ARRIVED AT CELEBES -



THE WHIPCORD-TOUGH AUSTRALIANS RECOVERED QUICKLY FROM THEIR WOUNDS. THEY HAD BUT ONE THOUGHT IN MIND, TO AVENGE THEIR DEAD SKIPPER, DAVE KEENAN.



ENSIGN BRENKE EXPLAINED
WHAT HE MEANT.

WE ARE PLANNING
A RAID ON THE JAP-HELD
HARBOUR OF DAYAO, IN THE PHILIPPINES.
WE HAVE A SPARE AIRCRAFT, AND
EVERY BOMB WE CAN DROP WILL
COUNT. WOULD YOU LIKE
TO COME ALONG?

WOULD WE! WE'VE
GOT OUR DRIVER RIGHT HERE
— RICKY BELLI WHEN DO
WE LEAVE?

HOLD ON A
MINUTE! I'VE NEVER FLOWN
A DORNIER ...

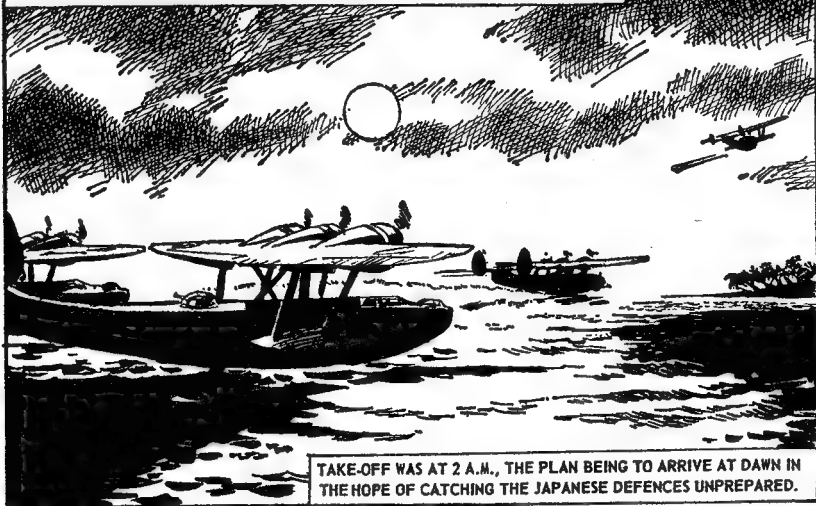
RICKY BROKE OFF, LOOKING AT THE AUSTRALIANS.
THREE PAIRS OF STEELY EYES GLARED BACK AT
HIM, DARING HIM TO REFUSE.

OKAY, BUT
IT'S GOING TO
BE RISKY.

THAT'S BETTER.
LET'S GO LOOK AT
OUR PLANE.

IF HE'D SAID 'NO',
I THINK THEY WOULD HAVE
STRANGLED HIM! WHAT WILD MEN
THESE AUSTRALIANS ARE!

RICKY FELT HE WOULD RATHER FACE THE WORST THE JAPS COULD OFFER THAN THE WRATH OF HIS
FIRE-EATING GUNNERS. HE WAS GLAD THAT BRENKE CAME ALONG AS NAVIGATOR.



TAKE-OFF WAS AT 2 A.M., THE PLAN BEING TO ARRIVE AT DAWN IN
THE HOPE OF CATCHING THE JAPANESE DEFENCES UNPREPARED.

THE FOUR DORNIERS WERE JOINED EN ROUTE BY THREE MORE FROM NEW GUINEA. TOGETHER THE SEVEN FLYING-BOATS DRONED STEADILY ON THEIR WAY.

WHY DID YOU CHOOSE TO COME WITH US, RATHER THAN WITH YOUR OWN CREW, BRENKE?

CURIOSITY MOSTLY. I WANT TO SEE IF YOUR AUSTRALIANS CAN FIGHT AS FIERCELY AS THEY TALK.

THE FIRST STREAKS OF DAWN FOUND THE DORNIERS APPROACHING THEIR TARGET. AS DAVAO APPEARED ON THE HORIZON ALL THE CREWS TENSED. THERE WERE FIRES BURNING IN THE HARBOUR!

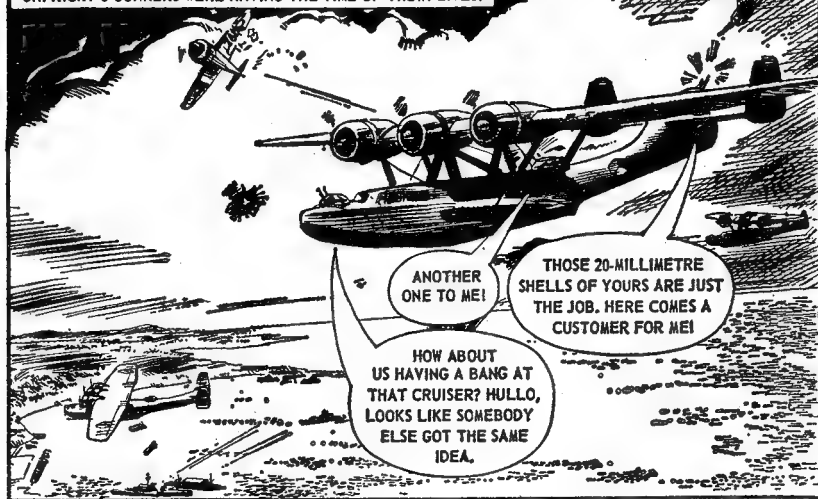
THE AMERICANS MUST HAVE RAIDED THE PLACE ALREADY. WE HAVE NO HOPE OF SURPRISE NOW.

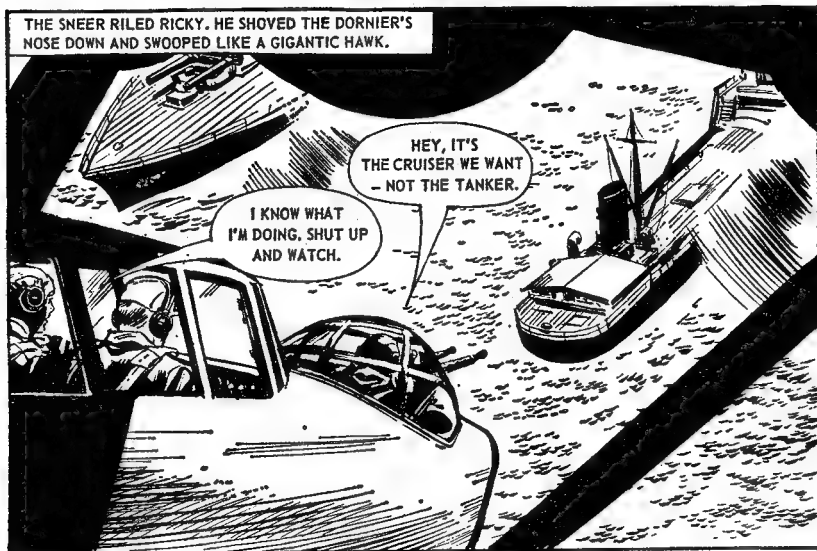
YOU'RE TELLING ME! LOOK! THE JAP FIGHTERS ARE UP, AND THE ANTI-AIRCRAFT GUNNERS ARE GETTING OUR RANGE ALREADY!

THE DORNIER'S ARMAMENT WAS VASTLY SUPERIOR TO THE OLD LONDON'S. TWO POWER-OPERATED TURRETS CARRIED HEAVY MACHINE-GUNS, THE THIRD A CANNON. A FORMIDABLE PUNCH, AS THE FIRST ZERO TO ATTACK FOUND OUT!



FIGHTERS WHIRLING ROUND THEM LIKE ANGRY HORNETS, THE BIG DORNIERS PLOUGHED ON. RICKY'S GUNNERS WERE HAVING THE TIME OF THEIR LIVES.





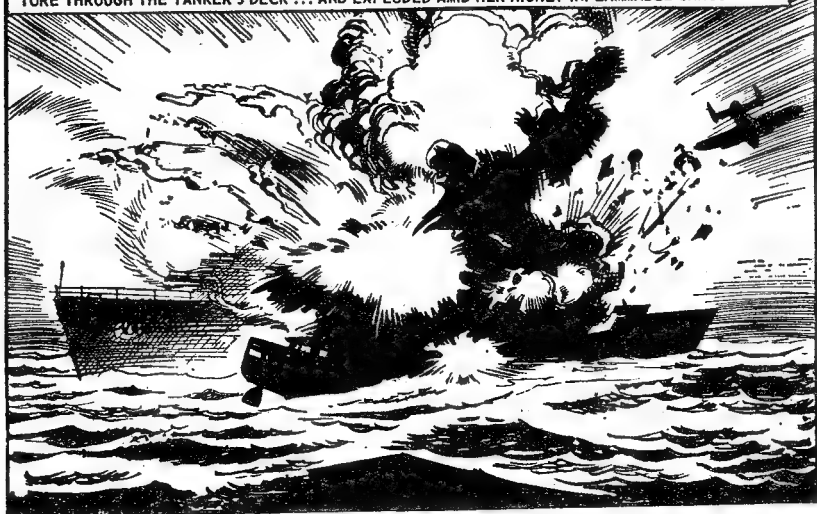
THE BIGGEST DIVE BOMBER IN HISTORY ROARED DOWN ON THE TANKER. AT MASTHEAD HEIGHT, RICKY YANKED THE BOMB RELEASE.

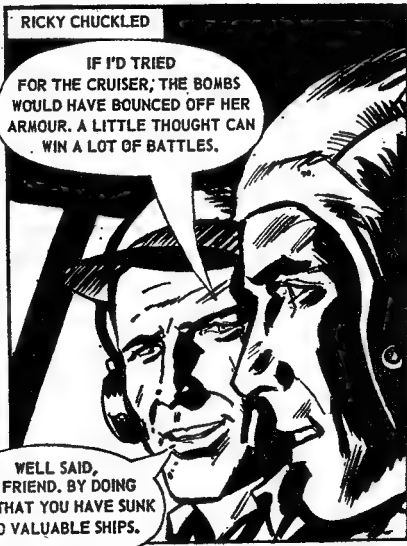


WHAT ARE YOU
PLAYING AT?

STOP YAPPING
AND CLOBBER THOSE GUNS
ON THE CRUISER BEFORE
THEY BLOW US OUT
OF THE SKY!

A HAIL OF BULLETS AND SHELLS SKITTLED THE JAP GUNNERS, WHILE THE BOMBS, STRAIGHT AND TRUE, TORE THROUGH THE TANKER'S DECK ... AND EXPLODED AMID HER HIGHLY INFLAMMABLE CARGO!





LEAVING THE AUSTRALIANS TO THINK THIS OVER, RICKY HEADED OUT TO SEA, STILL KEEPING LOW, USING THE BILLOWING SMOKE AS COVER FROM THE ANTI-AIRCRAFT GUNS.



THE REFUSAL BROUGHT HOWLS OF PROTEST FROM THE AUSTRALIANS. RICKY WAS ADAMANT. THEN BRENKE TOUCHED HIS ARM, FACE GRIM.

THE JAPANESE
WILL CAPTURE THEM. YOU
HAVE NOT SEEN WHAT THOSE DEVILS
DO TO THEIR PRISONERS. I HAVE
— AND IT IS NOT PRETTY.

THAT'S
DIFFERENT. OKAY
— HOLD TIGHT.

RICKY SET HIS MACHINE DOWN AND TAXIED TOWARDS THE STRICKEN DORNIER.

STAND BY
TO GET THEM
ABOARD!

THE JAPS
HAVE GOT THE SAME
IDEA. TWO BOATS ARE COMING
OUT FROM THE HARBOUR.

SWIFTLY THE SURVIVORS WERE HAULED ON TO THE DORNIER.

THAT'S THE LOT. LET 'ER RIP. WHERE ARE THE JAPS?

THE CRAFTY PERISHERS ARE GETTING UPWIND OF US. THEY KNOW WE'VE GOT TO TAKE OFF THAT WAY. THEY'LL BLOCK US.

IT SEEMED THAT ESCAPE WAS CUT OFF. BRENKE TURNED QUESTIONING EYES ON RICKY BELL.

WE CAN NEVER LIFT OFF IN SO SHORT A DISTANCE. THEY HAVE US TRAPPED.

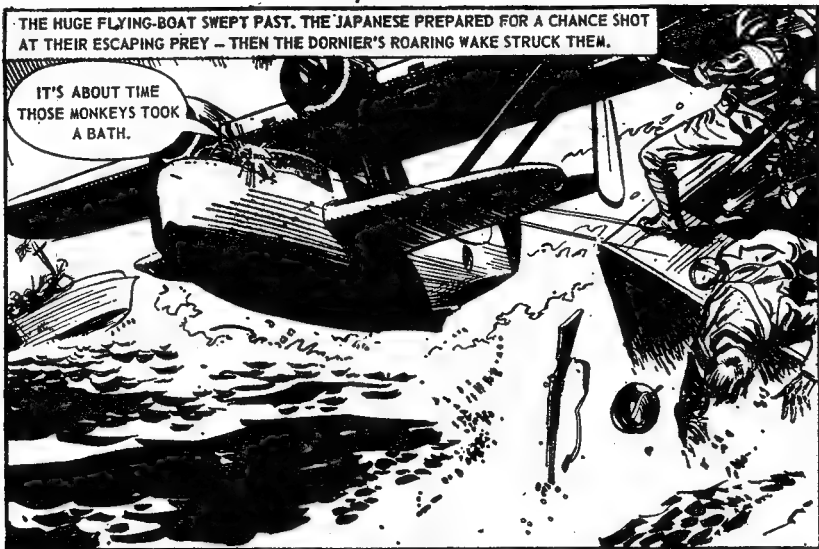
IF THEY DON'T GET OUT OF THE WAY, I'LL GO THROUGH THEM!

WITH THESE WORDS RICKY RAMMED THE THROTTLES WIDE OPEN. THE DORNIER LEAPED FORWARD, STRAIGHT AT THE JAP MOTOR-BOAT. SEEING THE BELLOWING MONSTER BOUNDING ACROSS THE WAVES TOWARDS THEM, EVEN THE FANATICAL JAPS' NERVE BROKE.

YEOW! HE IS A MADMAN!

THE HUGE FLYING-BOAT SWEEPED PAST. THE JAPANESE PREPARED FOR A CHANCE SHOT AT THEIR ESCAPING PREY – THEN THE DORNIER'S ROARING WAKE STRUCK THEM.

IT'S ABOUT TIME
THOSE MONKEYS TOOK
A BATH.



THE WHOLE WHIRLWIND ESCAPADE HAD OCCUPIED NO MORE THAN FIVE MINUTES, YET RICKY FELT HE HAD AGED FIVE YEARS!

WHEW! I
DON'T WANT TO GO
THROUGH THAT AGAIN
IN A HURRY.

A MAGNIFICENT
PIECE OF WORK.
CONGRATULATIONS!

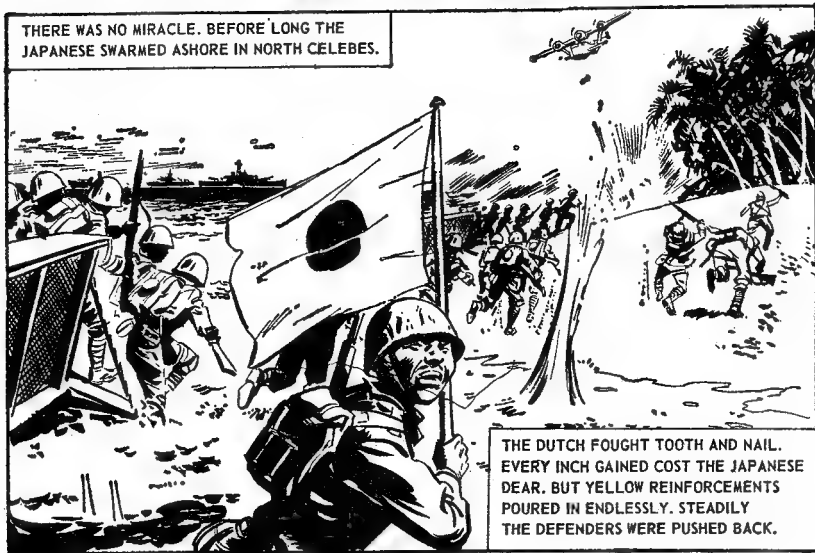
YEAH! BUT WE
HAD TO LEAN ON CLANGER
AWFUL HARD BEFORE
HE DID IT!



RICKY IGNORED THE JIBE. HE KNEW THE TERRIBLE RISK THEY HAD RUN. IF THEY HAD RAMMED A MOTOR-BOAT, THE IMPACT WOULD HAVE SMASHED THE DORNIER'S BOW. THE SUN WAS HIGH WHEN THEY ARRIVED BACK AT TONDANO BAY, CELEBES.



THERE WAS NO MIRACLE. BEFORE LONG THE JAPANESE SWARMED ASHORE IN NORTH CELEBES.



ALL THROUGH THAT TERRIBLE MONTH RICKY BELL AND THE AUSTRALIANS FOUGHT ALONGSIDE THE DUTCH, BOMBING THE LANDING BEACHES, SEEKING OUT TRANSPORT SHIPS AT SEA. BUT THERE WAS NO STEMMING THE JAPANESE HORDES. THEN, ONE MORNING, A SENIOR DUTCH OFFICER STRODE UP TO RICKY AND HIS CREW.

ALL AIRCREW WILL MAN THE REMAINING AIRCRAFT AND FLY TO AUSTRALIA. THIS IS AN ORDER. GOODBYE AND GOOD LUCK.

WHAT, RUN OUT ON YOU NOW? GIVE US RIFLES - WE'RE STAYING!

THE SECOND SPEAKER WAS TED RYAN, ONE OF RICKY'S GUNNERS.

A BRAVE SPEECH, MY FRIEND, BUT THE ORDER STANDS. YOU WILL GO WITH THE OTHERS.

LOOK HERE, WE'RE NOT IN YOUR ARMY, SO YOUR ORDERS DON'T COUNT.

THEN OBEY MINE. GET ABOARD AT ONCE. WE'RE WASTING TIME.

FORGET THE LECTURES. WE'RE NOT IN THE MOOD.

MUTTERING DARKLY, THE AUSTRALIANS OBEYED. THE DORNIERS TOOK OFF AND HEADED FOR DARWIN.

WHAT COULD WE DO? KILL A FEW JAPS, THEN GET KILLED OURSELVES, OR CAPTURED BY THEM, WHICH IS MUCH THE SAME THING. WE'RE MORE USE WHILE FREE TO CARRY ON THE FIGHT.

A FINE LOT OF MATES WE ARE - CLEARING OFF WHEN WE'RE NEEDED MOST..

THE FOUR AIRMEN RETURNED TO THEIR HOME BASE TO FIND THE SQUADRON PREPARING FOR THE MOVE TO ENGLAND.

ANOTHER DAY OR SO AND YOU'D HAVE MISSED US. WHAT AIRCRAFT WILL WE HAVE OVER THERE, BELL? SUNDERLANDS?

PROBABLY. YOU'LL LIKE THEM. TWO DECKS, AND ALL THE COMFORTS OF HOME. A BIT OF A HANDFUL AFTER THE OLD LONDONS, BUT YOU'LL SOON GET USED TO THEM.

YOU'D BETTER REMEMBER THAT DISCIPLINE IS STRICTER BACK HOME. WATCH HOW YOU ADDRESS SENIOR OFFICERS. BAGS OF THE OLD 'YES, SIR - NO, SIR' OTHERWISE YOU MIGHT LAND IN TROUBLE.

OH, YEAH? WE'LL SEE ABOUT THAT. ANYBODY WHO TRIES TO PULL RANK ON US WILL WISH HE HADN'T

DON'T YOU BE TOO SURE, MY LAD. IF YOU START ANYTHING I'LL FINISH IT!

ON ARRIVAL IN ENGLAND THE SQUADRON WERE GREETED BY A PEPPERY STAFF OFFICER, WHO AFTER THE FORMAL SPEECH OF WELCOME HAD A FEW THINGS TO SAY ABOUT MILITARY BEARING AND MANNERS.

YOU AUSTRALIANS MUST SMARTEN YOURSELVES UP. IT IS CUSTOMARY TO RISE WHEN A SENIOR OFFICER ENTERS THE ROOM. NOT ONE OF YOU MOVED! I'LL OVERLOOK IT THIS TIME, BUT IN FUTURE PROPER RESPECT MUST BE SHOWN.

FROM SOMEWHERE AMONG THE AUSTRALIANS CAME A LOUD SNORT OF DISGUST. FOR A MOMENT IT SEEMED THAT THE AIR COMMODORE WOULD BURST A BLOOD VESSEL. PURPLE WITH RAGE, HE STAMPED OUT. LATER, HE TOOK RICKY ASIDE.

A DISGRACEFUL EXHIBITION! LISTEN, BELL! I WANT YOU TO STAY WITH THIS GANG OF BUSH-RANGERS AND TRY TO INSTIL SOME RESPECT AND TRADITION INTO THEM. YOU'RE A CRANWELL MAN.

VERY WELL, SIR. BUT IT WON'T BE EASY.

I'LL BACK YOU TO THE HILT, BELL.

TO MAKE UP THE LARGER CREWS NECESSARY FOR THE SUNDERLANDS, EXTRA MEN HAD JOINED THE SQUADRON IN AUSTRALIA. SOON THE SORTING OUT BEGAN.

CONGRATULATIONS ON YOUR PROMOTION, BELL. NOW YOU'RE A FLIGHT-LIEUTENANT WITH A BOAT, YOU'LL NEED A CREW. I SEE YOU'VE GOT YOUR GUNNERS.

YES, SIR. THEY SAY THEY'D RATHER FLY WITH ME THAN A STRANGER.

DESPITE THE ANTAGONISM THAT STILL LURKED UNDER THE SURFACE, THESE THREE WHO HAD FLOWN WITH RICKY BELL IN ACTION KNEW HIM TO BE A SKILFUL, COURAGEOUS PILOT, A GOOD MAN IN A TIGHT CORNER.

FAIR ENOUGH. HERE ARE YOUR WIRELESS OPERATOR, NAVIGATOR, FLIGHT ENGINEER, AND YOUR SECOND PILOT.

HERE, WAIT A MINUTE! I'M A QUALIFIED PILOT! DON'T I GET MY OWN CREW?

PILOT OFFICER ALAN MARTIN, SPOILED SON OF A WEALTHY SHEEP FARMER, WAS USED TO HAVING HIS OWN WAY, AND HAD A LARGE OPINION OF HIS OWN ABILITIES.

HOW MANY OPERATIONAL PATROLS HAVE YOU DONE?

WELL, NONE! BUT I'M FULLY TRAINED.

TRAINED TO HANDLE A FLYING-BOAT, THAT'S ALL. YOU'VE A HECK OF A LOT TO LEARN. BELL HERE HAS FLOWN THESE WATERS. HE'S THE MAN TO TEACH YOU.

MARTIN EYED RICKY INSOLENTLY.

ALL MIGHT! SO I'VE GOT TO BE SECOND PILOT FOR A WHILE. BUT NOT WITH A FANCY-TALKING POMMY LIKE YOU! PUT ME WITH A REAL MAN!

WHY, YOU ARROGANT WHELP! YOU'LL FLY WITH ME, OR I'LL SEE TO IT YOU DON'T FLY AT ALL!





CHAPTER 3. Atlantic Patrol

THE AUSTRALIANS WERE GREATLY IMPRESSED BY THE SIZE OF THE SUNDERLAND FLYING-BOATS.

LOOK AT THOSE GUNS IN THE STERN TURRET! FOUR OF THEM! I'M GOING TO ENJOY FLYING IN THIS BEAUT.

NOW THAT'S WHAT I CALL A MAN-SIZED AEROPLANE!

ALWAYS ASSUMING OUR CAPTAIN CAN GET IT INTO THE AIR!

THE FIRST FLIGHT WAS NOT A SUCCESS. MARTIN WAS EAGER TO PROVE THAT HE WAS FULLY COMPETENT TO COMMAND THE BOAT.

WHEN DO I GET A CHANCE TO FLY THIS THING?

ALL IN GOOD TIME. I'M A BIT RUSTY ON SUNDERLANDS MYSELF. IF YOU WANT A JOB, GO AND CHECK THAT THE CREW ARE SETTLING DOWN.

DISGUSTED AT BEING MADE, AS HE IMAGINED, AN ERRAND BOY, MARTIN SET ABOUT WINNING THE CREW OVER TO HIS WAY OF THINKING.

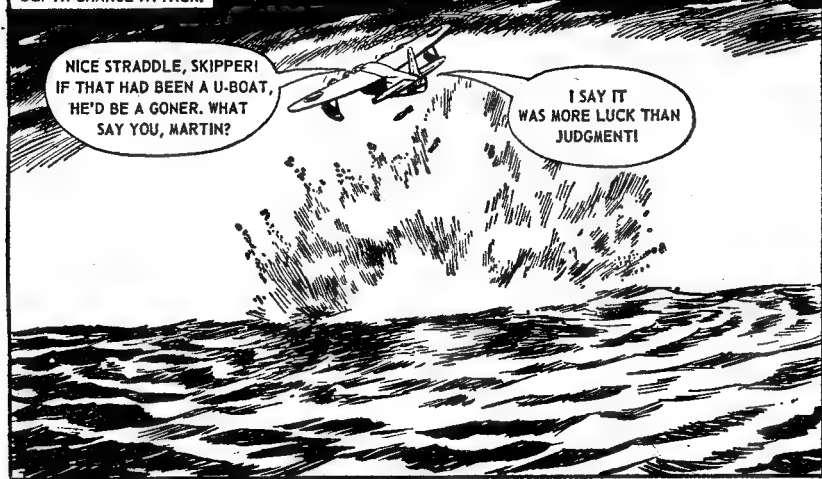
A BIT RUSTY, BELL SAYS. I THOUGHT HE WAS SUPPOSED TO BE AN EXPERT.

THE SKIPPER'S ALL RIGHT, FOR ALL HIS TOFFEE-NOSE WAYS. YOU SHOULD HAVE SEEN HIM IN ACTION AT DAVAO!

REALISING HE WOULD MAKE NO HEADWAY WITH THE GUNNERS, MARTIN TURNED HIS ATTENTION TO THE NEWCOMERS.



MARTIN'S EFFORTS TO UNDERMINE THE CREW'S CONFIDENCE IN THEIR CAPTAIN KEPT THEM JUMPY, ON EDGE. NONETHELESS, RICKY SHOWED HIS AIM WAS STILL GOOD WHEN THEY CARRIED OUT A PRACTICE DEPTH CHARGE ATTACK.



THEY DID NOT DO SO WELL WHEN HURRICANES OF FIGHTER COMMAND ACTED THE PART OF ENEMY AIRCRAFT TO TEST THE GUNNERS.

YOU'RE A DEAD DUCK, SUNDERLAND!

WHERE THE BLAZES DID HE SPRING FROM?

OUT OF THE SUN, WHERE YOU SHOULD HAVE BEEN LOOKING.

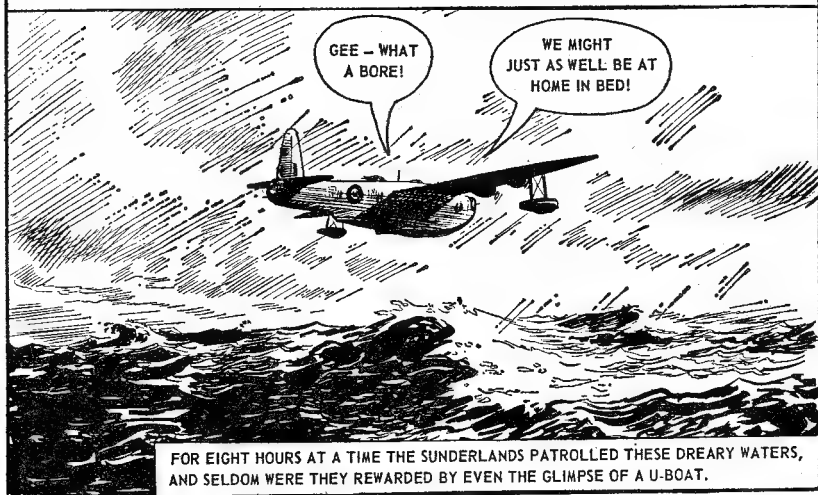
THAT'LL DO, MARTIN. ALL YOUR CHATTER DOESN'T HELP.

THE COMMANDING OFFICER COULD JUDGE HIS CREWS ONLY ON RESULTS, AND THOSE OF RICKY BELL'S MEN WERE FAR FROM SATISFACTORY.

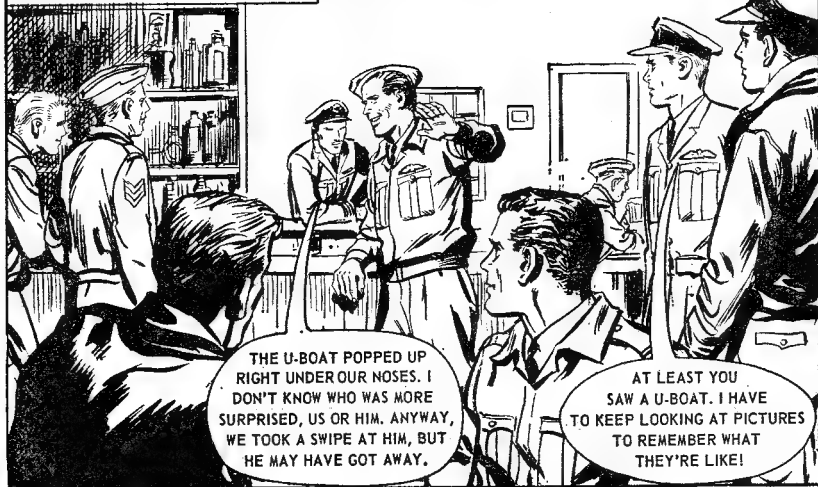
YOUR CREW DON'T GET ALONG AS THEY SHOULD, BELL. LOOK AT THEM! ONE FOR YOU, TWO AGAINST YOU, AND TWO NEUTRAL.

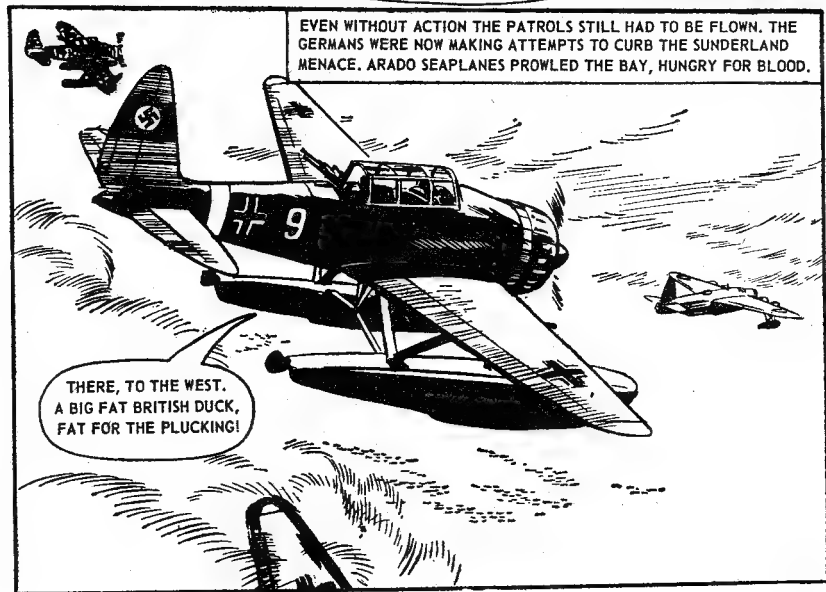
GIVE THEM TIME, SIR. THEY'LL PULL TOGETHER WHEN WE GET ON OPERATIONS.

OPERATIONS IN THE BAY OF BISCAY WERE ARDUOUS IN THE EXTREME, THE WEATHER WAS ALWAYS THE SAME ... TERRIBLE. LOW CLOUD, RAIN SQUALLS, FOG - THE BAY HAD THEM ALL IN DOUBLE MEASURE.



THE WEEKS LENGTHENED INTO MONTHS. SOME OF THE CREWS WERE LUCKY. BUT NOT RICKY BELL'S

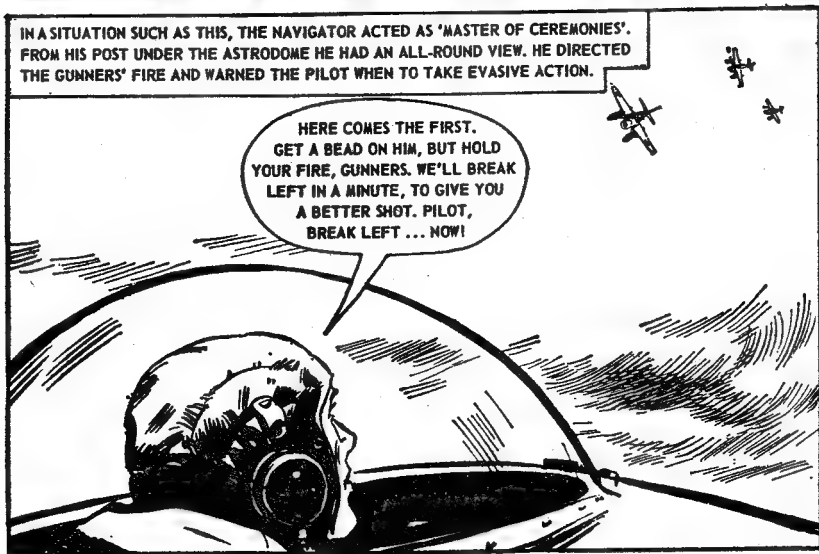




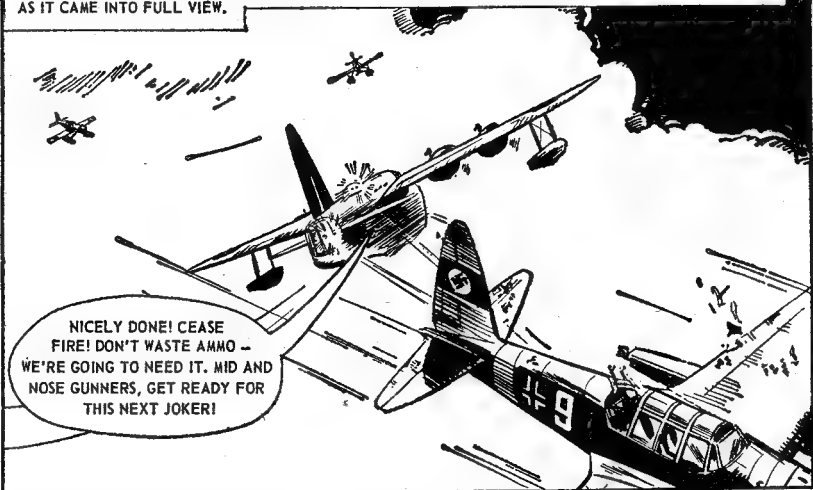
AT THE SAME INSTANT, IN THE SUNDERLAND, RICKY BELL SPOTTED THE THREE SEAPLANES.



IN A SITUATION SUCH AS THIS, THE NAVIGATOR ACTED AS 'MASTER OF CEREMONIES'. FROM HIS POST UNDER THE ASTRODOME HE HAD AN ALL-ROUND VIEW. HE DIRECTED THE GUNNERS' FIRE AND WARNED THE PILOT WHEN TO TAKE EVASIVE ACTION.



RICKY THREW HIS WEIGHT ON THE CONTROLS, AND THE SUNDERLAND SNATCHED HER TAIL OUT OF THE GERMAN'S SIGHTS. THE BRITISH GUNNERS WASTED NO TIME - THEY LET RIP INTO THE ARADO AS IT CAME INTO FULL VIEW.



NICELY DONE! CEASE FIRE! DON'T WASTE AMMO - WE'RE GOING TO NEED IT. MID AND NOSE GUNNERS, GET READY FOR THIS NEXT JOKER!

The illustration shows a Sunderland flying boat in a steep climb, its tail fin clearly visible. It is firing at a German Arado fighter. The Arado is shown from a side-on perspective, with its wings and fuselage. The background is filled with smoke and other aircraft, suggesting a busy battle scene.

THE GUNS SWIVELLED TO LINE UP ON THE NEW TARGET. THE ARADO DROVE IN, GUNS BLAZING. NAVIGATOR POOLTON WATCHED IT COME, WAITING FOR THE RIGHT MOMENT.



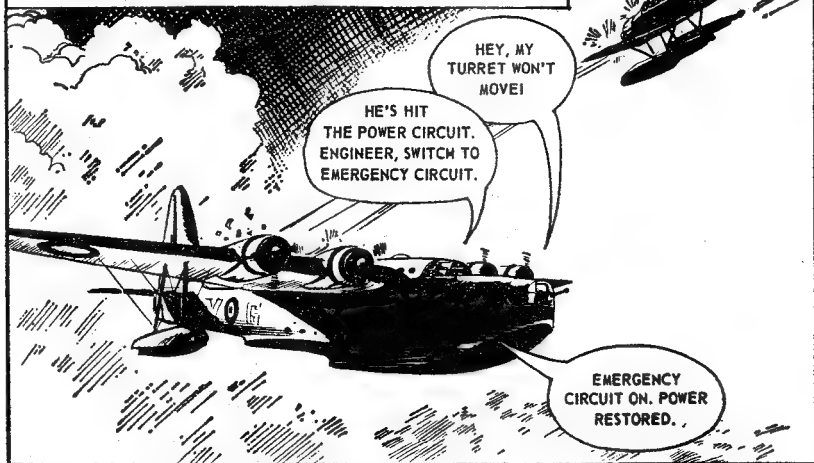
HOLD IT! ANY MINUTE NOW ...

The illustration shows a Sunderland flying boat from a low angle, looking up at it. The Arado fighter is diving towards the Sunderland. The background is filled with smoke and other aircraft, suggesting a busy battle scene.

WATCH OUT FOR THE THIRD ONE!

THE SECOND VOICE WAS THAT OF MARTINI

INSTINCTIVELY THE GUNNER IN THE NOSE SWUNG HIS SIGHTS AHEAD. THE CROSSFIRE WAS BROKEN. THE ORIGINAL ATTACKER EASILY AVOIDED THE FIRE OF THE MIDSHIPS TURRET AND SLAMMED IN A TELLING BURST.



WHILE THE ENGINEER WENT TO FIND AND MEND THE DAMAGE, THE ONSLAUGHTS FROM THE THREE GERMAN PLANES CONTINUED.



THE BUILT-IN EXTINGUISHER DOUSED THE FLAMES, BUT THE ENGINE WAS KNOCKED OUT. THE HEAVILY-LOADED SUNDERLAND BEGAN TO LOSE HEIGHT.

I'LL HAVE TO LIGHTEN HER. PREPARE TO JETTISON DEPTH CHARGES.

IF YOU'D KEPT YOUR LIP BUTTONED, MARTIN, WE WOULDN'T BE IN THIS FIX.

THAT'S RIGHT, BLAME IT ON ME!

THE DEPTH CHARGES, DEFUSED, SPLASHED USELESSLY INTO THE SEA. SEEING THE SUNDERLAND'S FANGS DRAWN, THE ARADOS MADE OFF SATISFIED.

WE SCARED THEM OFF, ANYWAY.

ROT! THEY KNOW WE CAN'T ATTACK A U-BOAT NOW, SO THEY DON'T INTEND RISKING THEIR NECKS ANY MORE. CONGRATULATIONS, CHUMP!

OH, SHUT UP, THE PAIR OF YOU!

A CHILLY SILENCE FELL ON THE CREW OF THE SUNDERLAND AS IT TURNED FOR HOME. THERE WAS NO POINT IN STAYING. HALF AN HOUR LATER A CRY CAME FROM THE NOSE-GUNNER.

SUBMARINE SURFACING - RIGHT AHEAD OF US!

WELL, IF THAT DOESN'T TAKE THE CAKE, A U-BOAT HANDED TO US ON A PLATE, AND WE'VE THROWN AWAY OUR SPOON.

THE SUNDERLAND'S MACHINE-GUNS, OF COURSE, WOULD BE NO MATCH AGAINST THE U-BOAT'S CANNON.

WHEN THE SUNDERLAND MADE NO MOVE TO ATTACK, THE U-BOAT MEN GUESSED SHE WAS POWERLESS TO HARM THEM. THEY WAVED INSOLENTLY AS THE FLYING-BOAT PASSED OVER, HER CREW FUMING WITH IMPOTENT RAGE.

LOOK AT THOSE
JERRIES! THEY'RE LAUGHING
THEIR HEADS OFF!

IF IT WASN'T
FOR LOUD-MOUTH MARTIN,
WE'D MAKE THEM LAUGH ON
THE OTHER SIDE OF THEIR
FACES. JUST WAIT TILL
WE GET HOME!

BACK AT BASE, THE SILENCE HELD UNTIL THE CREW STEPPED ASHORE ON THE JETTY. THEN RICKY BELL FACED MARTIN SQUARELY.

IT'S TIME WE HAD A
SHOWDOWN. A FLYING-BOAT CREW
MUST BE A TEAM, AND ONE MAN MUST
LEAD THAT TEAM. THANKS TO
YOU, I'VE NEITHER.

THEN YOU'D
BETTER STEP DOWN
AND LET A BETTER
MAN TRY.

RICKY FOUGHT DOWN HIS RISING TEMPER AT MARTIN'S COCKSURE ATTITUDE. WITH AN EFFORT HE KEPT HIS VOICE STEADY.

LOOK, MARTIN!
COMMANDING A
SUNDERLAND ISN'T JUST
SITTING IN THE CAPTAIN'S
SEAT AND GIVING
ORDERS. IT DEMANDS
A LOT FROM A MAN.
I HAD TO SERVE MY
TIME IN THE CO-
PILOT'S SEAT -

DON'T TRY
TO SOFT-SOAP ME.
I COULD DO YOUR JOB WITH
ONE HAND TIED BEHIND ME.
YOU POMMIES MAKE
ME SICK.

RICKY'S SELF-CONTROL BROKE. ALL THE PENT-UP RESENTMENT AT MARTIN'S JIBING AND INTERFERENCE EXPLODED.



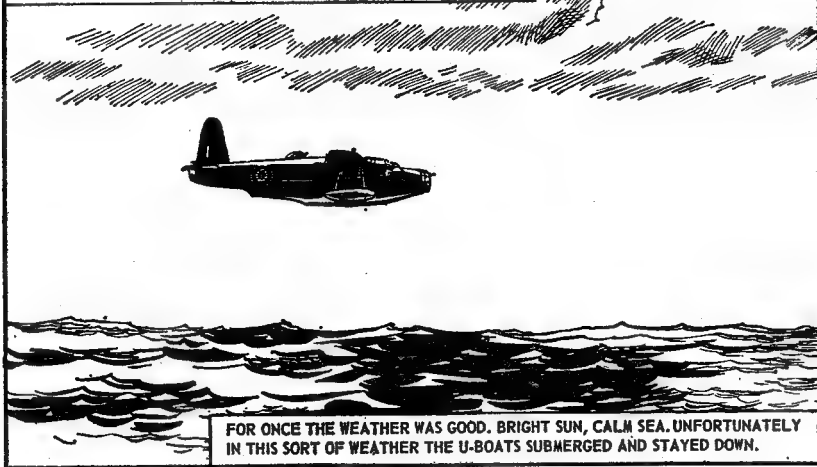
BUT AUSTRALIAN BLOOD WAS UP. THE TWO FACTIONS CLASHED, OTHERS TRIED TO BREAK UP THE FIGHT, AND FOUND THEMSELVES IN THE MIDDLE OF IT. AT THAT VERY MOMENT THE COMMANDING-OFFICER APPEARED!



THE ICE-COLD TONES HIT THE WRITHING, CLAWING MEN LIKE A BUCKET OF WATER. THEY SCRAMBLED TO ATTENTION AND STOOD SHAMEFACEDLY WHILE THE WING-COMMANDER LAID INTO THEM.



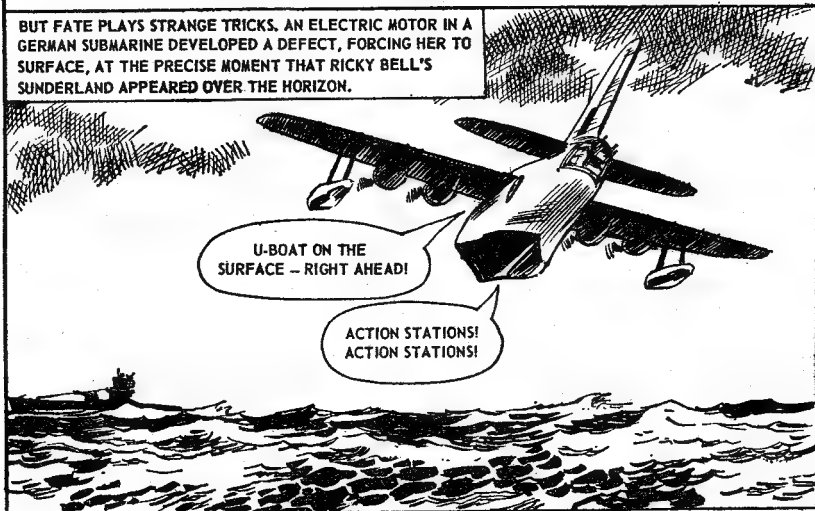
THE C.O. ALSO MADE IT CLEAR THAT IF RICKY BELL AND HIS CREW DIDN'T PULL THEMSELVES TOGETHER, HE WOULD DISPERSE THEM TO OTHER SQUADRONS. WITH THIS THREAT HANGING OVER THEM, THEY SET OFF AGAIN IN THEIR REPAIRED SUNDERLAND.



FOR ONCE THE WEATHER WAS GOOD. BRIGHT SUN, CALM SEA. UNFORTUNATELY IN THIS SORT OF WEATHER THE U-BOATS SUBMERGED AND STAYED DOWN.

CHAPTER 4. U-Boat Battle

BUT FATE PLAYS STRANGE TRICKS. AN ELECTRIC MOTOR IN A GERMAN SUBMARINE DEVELOPED A DEFECT, FORCING HER TO SURFACE, AT THE PRECISE MOMENT THAT RICKY BELL'S SUNDERLAND APPEARED OVER THE HORIZON.



U-BOAT ON THE
SURFACE - RIGHT AHEAD!

ACTION STATIONS!
ACTION STATIONS!



THE U-BOAT MEN LEAPT TO THEIR GUNS. STREAMS OF BULLETS AND HIGH EXPLOSIVE HURTLED AT THE SUNDERLAND, WHICH SCREAMED IN LIKE A GIGANTIC SEA BIRD SWOOPING ON ITS PREY. THEN THE SUNDERLAND TURNED ASIDE.

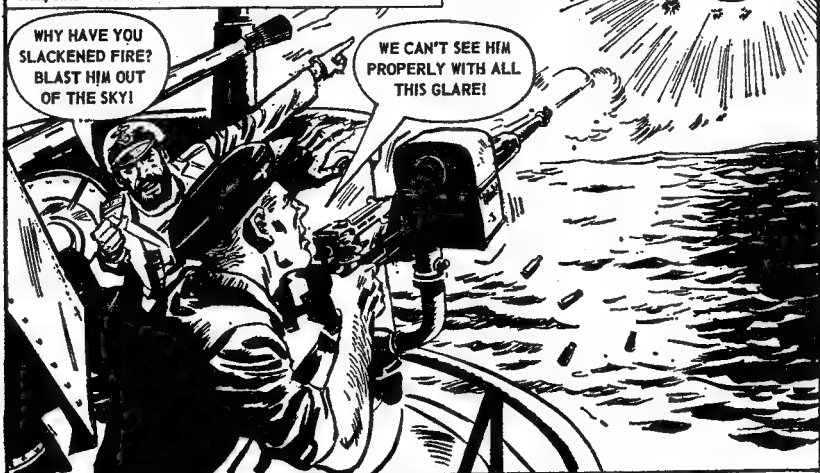
WHAT'S THE MATTER,
CAPTAIN? SCARED OF
A BIT OF FLAK?

WE'LL NEVER GET
THROUGH THAT LOT.
WE'LL TRY OTHER
TACTICS. JUST BE
QUIET AND WATCH.

RICKY BELL KNEW WHAT HE WAS DOING. PURSUED BY THE HAIL OF FLAME AND STEEL FROM THE SUBMARINE, HE WORKED HIS WAY ROUND UNTIL HE HAD THE SUN BEHIND HIM, AND RIGHT IN THE EYES OF THE GERMAN GUNNERS.

WHY HAVE YOU
SLACKENED FIRE?
BLAST HIM OUT
OF THE SKY!

WE CAN'T SEE HIM
PROPERLY WITH ALL
THIS GLARE!

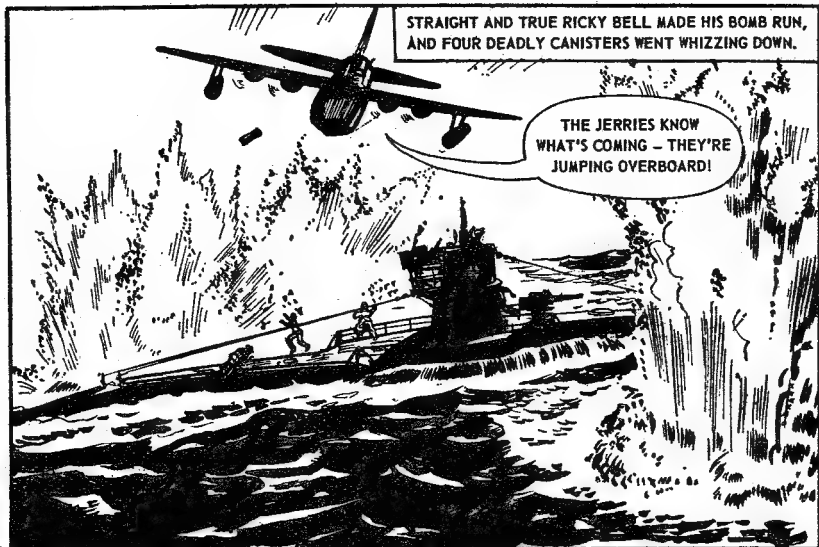


RICKY BELL'S MOVE WAS PAYING OFF. IGNORING THE NOW INACCURATE ANTI-AIRCRAFT FIRE, HE SENT THE SUNDERLAND CHARGING IN AGAIN. MARTIN SHORTED.

YOU WASTED TIME WITH
ALL THIS MUCKING ABOUT. HE'LL
DIVE BEFORE WE GET THERE.

IF YOU LOOK YOU'LL SEE THE
CAPTAIN STILL ON THE BRIDGE.
GIVE ME FULL POWER - AND BE
READY WITH DEPTH CHARGES.





THE DEPTH CHARGES, SET SHALLOW, DETONATED IN ONE TITANIC EXPLOSION, CRUSHING THE UNDERSEA KILLER LIKE AN EGG SHELL.



WHEN THE MOUNTAINS OF SPRAY SETTLED, ALL THAT WAS LEFT WAS A WIDENING POOL OF OIL AND A FEW SCRAPS OF WRECKAGE.



CHEERS RANG THROUGH THE SUNDERLAND. THEY HAD WANTED PROOF OF RICKY'S ABILITY - NOW THEY HAD IT. THERE WAS ONLY ONE DISSENTING VOICE - THAT OF MARTIN.

I STILL SAY WE COULD HAVE GOT HIM THE FIRST TIME, FLAK OR NO FLAK.

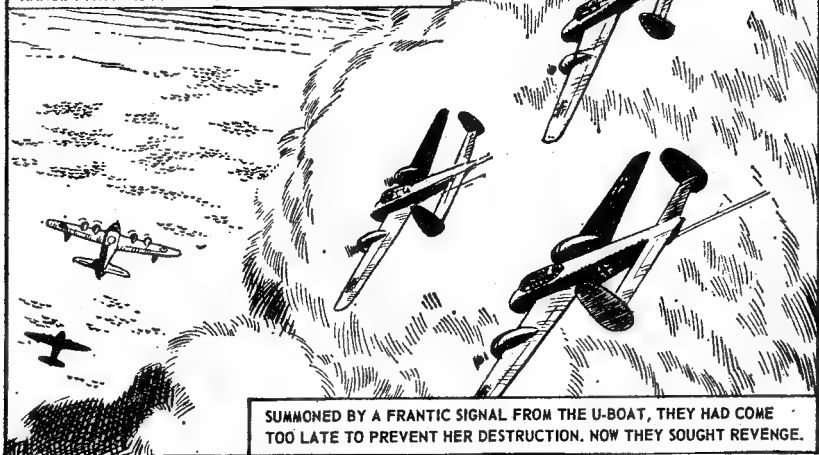
TAKE NO NOTICE OF HIM, SKIPPER. NICE GOING!

THANKS. THAT SUB CERTAINLY GAVE US A RUN FOR OUR MONEY.

ALL AT ONCE THE TAIL-GUNNER LET OUT A YELL.

THREE AIRCRAFT TO THE EAST!
TWIN-ENGINE LANDPLANES,
COMING IN FAST!

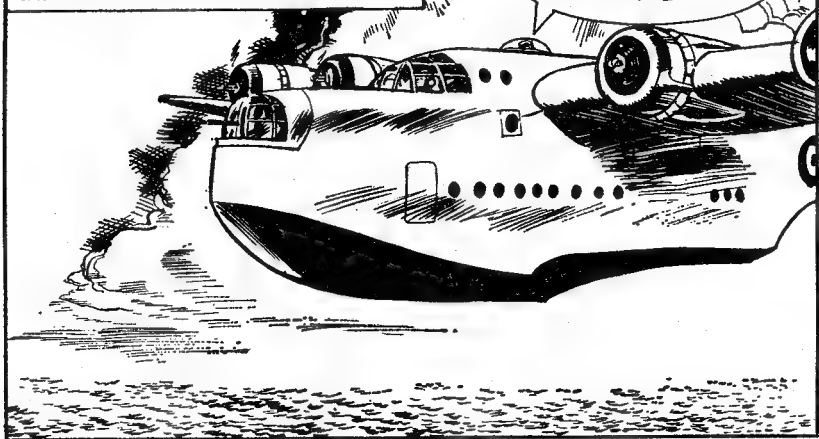
AS COASTAL COMMAND SUCCESSES MOUNTED, THE U-BOAT COMMAND HAD APPEALED TO THE GERMAN AIR FORCE TO HELP AGAINST THE SUNDERLANDS. NOW FAST, HEAVILY-ARMED MESSERSCHMITT LONG-RANGE FIGHTERS PATROLLED THE SUBMARINE ROUTES.



SUMMONED BY A FRANTIC SIGNAL FROM THE U-BOAT, THEY HAD COME TOO LATE TO PREVENT HER DESTRUCTION. NOW THEY SOUGHT REVENGE.

THESE SPEEDY, HARD-HITTING PLANES WERE A VERY DIFFERENT PROPOSITION FROM THE ARADOS PREVIOUSLY ENCOUNTERED, AND THE MEN IN THE FLYING-BOAT KNEW IT. NAVIGATOR POOLTON SPRANG TO HIS POST IN THE ASTRODOME.

THIS IS GOING TO BE RUGGED. MARTIN, ONE PEEP OUT OF YOU AND I'LL COME DOWN THERE AND DONG YOU. RIGHT ... GUNNERS, STAND BY!



FOLLOWING THE NAVIGATOR'S ORDERS, THE GUNNERS CROSSED THEIR FIRE ON THE LEADING MESSERSCHMITT. UNDETERRED BY THE CONE OF FIERY DEATH REACHING OUT AT HIM, THE GERMAN PILOT HELD ON, AND THE SUNDERLAND BUCKED AND SHUDDERED AS CANNON-SHELLS SLAMMED HOME.

GOSH! THAT
BOY GAVE US A REAL
PEPPERING!

LEAVE HIM.
GET A BEAD IN THE
SECOND ONE!

THE GUNS OF THE SECOND FIGHTER BLAZED, AND THE BRIDGE WAS FILLED WITH FLYING PERSPEX AS THE SUPERBLY-AIMED BURST FOUND ITS MARK. RICKY BELL UTTERED A HOARSE GASP.

UUUUUUUH!

ARE YOU ALL
RIGHT, SKIPPER?

THERE WAS NO ANSWER. RICKY SLUMPED FORWARD, BLOOD TRICKLING FROM UNDER HIS HELMET. OUT OF CONTROL. THE SUNDERLAND TILTED OVER. HALE CAME POUNDING ON TO THE BRIDGE.



EXERTING ALL HIS STRENGTH, MARTIN STOPPED THE FLYING-BOAT'S MAD DIVE. MEANWHILE, THE MESSERSCHMITTS ROARED IN AGAIN, EAGER FOR THE KILL.



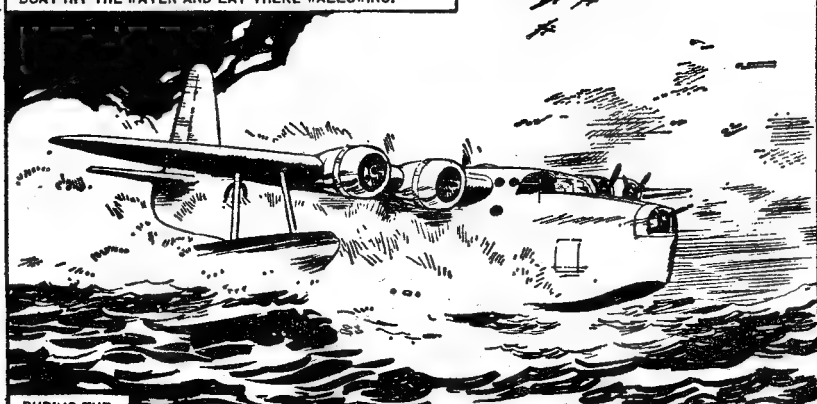
BY USING THE ENGINES IN A WAY THAT WOULD HAVE GIVEN THE DESIGNER NIGHTMARES, A SUNDERLAND COULD BE MADE TO TURN LIKE A FIGHTER. MARTIN DIDN'T KNOW THIS.



BULLETS HAD SMASHED POOLTON'S LEGS FROM UNDER HIM, TOPPLING HIM INTO A PAIN-RACKED HEAP ON THE DECK. ANOTHER BURST HAMMERED THE PORT WING.



TWO ENGINES COULD NOT HOLD UP TWENTY-ODD TONS OF SUNDERLAND. MARTIN DID HIS BEST, BUT THE SEA WAS CHOPPY NOW. WITH A TREMENDOUS SPLASH, THE FLYING-BOAT HIT THE WATER AND LAY THERE WALLOWING.



DURING THE ENGAGEMENT, THE WEATHER HAD STEADILY WORSENER. MENACING BLACK CLOUDS COVERED THE SKY; THE SEA HEAVED RESTLESSLY. SATISFIED THEIR PREY WAS DONE FOR, THE GERMANS RACED FOR HOME.

CONVINCED THAT THE SUNDERLAND WOULD SINK AT ANY MINUTE, MARTIN GAVE ORDERS TO LAUNCH THE DINGHY AND ABANDON SHIP. A SHAKY BUT COMMANDING VOICE STOPPED HIM - THE VOICE OF RICKY BELL.



STAND FAST, ALL OF YOU. WE'RE NOT FINISHED YET. POOLTON WON'T LAST AN HOUR IN THE DINGHY. WE'RE GOING HOME. LISTEN CAREFULLY - THERE'S A LOT TO DO.

CLEARLY, CONFIDENTLY, RICKY BELL ISSUED HIS ORDERS. ALL SURPLUS GEAR WAS TO BE THROWN OVERBOARD TO LIGHTEN THE BOAT, THE KEEL EXAMINED, LEAKS STOPPED.



USE THE PROPER LEAK STOPPERS. WHEN THEY'RE ALL GONE, USE ANYTHING THAT'LL BUNG UP A HOLE. ENGINEER, THOSE ENGINES JUST STOPPED. NO FIRE OR ANYTHING. MY GUESS IS A FUEL LINE WAS CUT. TAKE A LOOK, WILL YOU?

I'M ON MY WAY!

IT WAS POSSIBLE TO GET INSIDE THE CAVERNOUS WINGS FROM THE HULL. THIS THE ENGINEER DID, WEARING A SCARF OVER HIS NOSE AND MOUTH TO REDUCE THE RISK OF BEING OVERCOME BY PETROL FUMES. TEN MINUTES LATER HE WAS BACK.

ALL FIXED! YOU
CAN RUN THOSE ENGINES
ANY TIME YOU WANT

THE SHIP NATURALLY
TURNS HEAD TO WIND, AND
THAT PUTS HER BEAM ON TO
THE SEA. NOW THE ENGINES
ARE OKAY I CAN TURN HER.


WITH THE PORT OUTER ENGINE RUNNING, THE THRUST PULLED THE SUNDERLAND'S BOWS HEAD ON TO THE SEA, MAKING HER RIDE MORE EASILY.

THAT'S BETTER. NOW
I CAN GET THE PUMP GOING.
OLD BELL KNOWS A THING OR TWO.
GET THIS WATER OUT, AND WE'LL
BE AWAY.

IN THIS WIND AND
SEA? IT'S SUICIDE.

IF RICKY BELL
CAN'T DO IT, NOBODY
CAN - LEAST OF ALL
YOU, MARTIN!

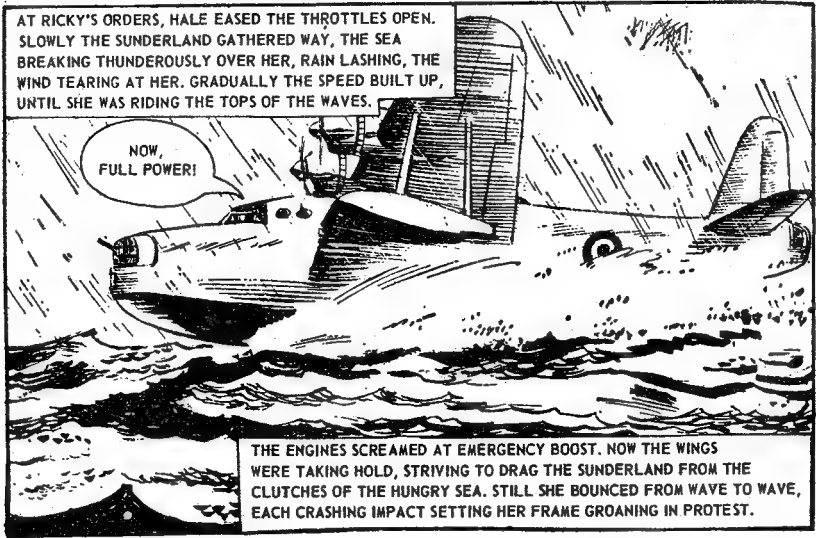
FINALLY ALL WAS READY. THE WHOLE CREW WENT UP TO THE BRIDGE. AT THE VERY MOMENT RICKY STARTED THE REMAINING ENGINES, THE FULL FURY OF THE STORM BROKE.



WHY COULDN'T IT
HOLD OFF JUST A MINUTE
LONGER? WE'LL NEVER
GET OFF NOW.

YES, WE WILL,
IF YOU DO EXACTLY AS
I SAY, AT ONCE AND WITHOUT
QUESTION. ALL RIGHT? THEN HANG
ON - HERE WE GO!

AT RICKY'S ORDERS, HALE EASED THE THROTTLES OPEN. SLOWLY THE SUNDERLAND GATHERED WAY, THE SEA BREAKING THUNDEROUSLY OVER HER, RAIN LASHING, THE WIND TEARING AT HER. GRADUALLY THE SPEED BUILT UP, UNTIL SHE WAS RIDING THE TOPS OF THE WAVES.



NOW,
FULL POWER!

THE ENGINES SCREAMED AT EMERGENCY BOOST. NOW THE WINGS WERE TAKING HOLD, STRIVING TO DRAG THE SUNDERLAND FROM THE CLUTCHES OF THE HUNGRY SEA. STILL SHE BOUNCED FROM WAVE TO WAVE, EACH CRASHING IMPACT SETTING HER FRAME GROANING IN PROTEST.



ONE FINAL SPINE-JARRING THUD AND SHE WAS CLEAR. SOAKED TO THE SKIN, BRUISED BUT TRIUMPHANT, THE AUSTRALIANS LOOKED AT RICKY BELL WITH A NEW RESPECT.

TAKE OVER, SECOND. GET UP ABOVE THE CLOUDS. WHEN THE COMPASS SETTLES DOWN, STEER ... THUNDER! WHAT'S THE COURSE?

THREE FOUR NINE, SKIPPER. POOLTON DRAGGED HIMSELF TO HIS TABLE AND WORKED IT OUT. SAID IT WAS ABOUT TIME HE DID SOMETHING USEFUL. I'M OFF TO SEE IF THERE'S ANY KEEL LEFT.

THE HULL BOTTOM HAD TAKEN A TREMENDOUS HAMMERING IN THAT WILD TAKE-OFF. HOW TREMENDOUS ENGINEER HALE FOUND OUT WHEN HE OPENED THE WARDROOM DOOR ... AND LEAPT BACK IN HORROR.



JUMPING CATS! THAT MUST HAVE BEEN THE LAST THUMP WE FELT.

HALE REPORTED TO RICKY BELL.

THERE'S A SEVEN-FOOT HOLE IN THE BOTTOM. IF WE TOUCH DOWN SHE'LL SINK LIKE A STONE. WE'LL HAVE TO GET CLOSE TO LAND, THEN BALE OUT.

POOLTON WOULD NEVER SURVIVE A PARACHUTE LANDING. NOW WHAT? WE CAN'T STAY UP FOR EVER.

RICKY THOUGHT HARD FOR A MOMENT. THEN HIS BROW CLEARED, AND THE GHOST OF A SMILE PLAYED ROUND HIS LIPS. TAKING UP A MESSAGE PAD, HE WROTE RAPIDLY AND HANDED IT TO HALE. THE ENGINEER GAVE A GASP.

WHAT THE ... YOU'RE BARMY!
IT'S IMPOSSIBLE!

THAT'S A WORD I'VE FORGOTTEN THE MEANING OF. WIN OR LOSE, WE CAN'T BE ANY WORSE OFF. GET SPARKS TO SEND IT IMMEDIATELY!

WHEN THE COMMANDING OFFICER READ THE SIGNAL, HIS HAIR STOOD ON END. HE CHARGED OUT OF THE OFFICE TO HIS CAR.

ONE OF OUR
SUNDERLANDS IS GOING
TO LAND AT BRUXTON AIRFIELD.
MOVE OVER - I'LL DRIVE!

BUT SURELY
THERE'S NO WATER
AT BRUXTON, SIR!

WITHOUT EXPLAINING, THE COMMANDING OFFICER BROKE ALL RECORDS FOR THE TWO-MILE TRIP, SCARING THE DRIVER OUT OF HIS WITS. HE ARRIVED JUST WHEN THE BEAT OF PEGASUS ENGINES SOUNDED FROM THE EAST.

HERE THEY
COME! CROSS YOUR
FINGERS!

THEY'LL ALL BE
KILLED! A SUNDERLAND
CAN'T LAND WHERE
THERE'S NO WATER!



ALL THE WATCHERS HELD THEIR BREATH AS THE HUGE FLYING-BOAT SANK LOWER. RICKY BELL, THOUGHTFUL AS EVER, WAS AIMING TO TOUCH DOWN ON THE GRASS BESIDE THE RUNWAY. THEN THE KEEL STRUCK.



WITH A SCREECHING OF TORTURED METAL, THE SUNDERLAND PLOUGHED A GREAT FURROW. THE EARTH DRAGGING AT HER HULL SLOWED HER, AS RICKY HAD INTENDED.

AT LAST THE GREAT JUGGERNAUT GROUND TO A STOP. FEELING ABSOLUTELY EXHAUSTED, BUT HAPPY, RICKY REACHED OUT AND CUT THE MOTORS.



I WOULDN'T HAVE BELIEVED IT IF I HADN'T SEEN IT. ANY CASUALTIES?

NAVIGATOR HIT IN THE LEGS, SIR, AND THE SKIPPER GOT GRAZED.

DAZED, SHAKEN, BUT ALIVE, THE CREW TUMBLED OUT. THEY SAW POOLTON SAFELY INTO THE AMBULANCE, THEN MARTIN GRABBED RICKY'S HAND.

YOU WERE RIGHT ALL THE TIME, SKIPPER. I SAID A LOT OF THINGS I'M SORRY FOR NOW. I'VE A LOT TO LEARN ABOUT SUNDERLAND PILOTING. HOW ABOUT TEACHING ME?

YOU'VE ALREADY HAD YOUR FIRST LESSON, AND I THINK YOU'LL BE A GOOD PUPIL.



RICKY'S CREW WERE AT LAST A TEAM, AND HE THEIR UNDISPUTED LEADER.

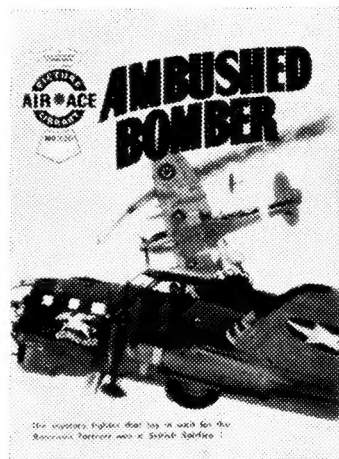
Printed in England by Fleetway Printers Ltd., 17 Sumner Street, London, S.E.1, and published each month by Fleetway Publications Ltd., Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Sole Agents: Australasia, Messrs. Gordon & Gotch, Ltd.; South Africa, Central News Agency, Ltd.; Rhodesia, Zambia and Malawi, Messrs. Kingstons, Ltd. AIR ACE PICTURE LIBRARY is sold subject to the following conditions, that it shall not without the written consent of the Publishers first given, be lent, resold, hired out or otherwise disposed of by way of Trade except at the full retail price as shown on the cover; and that it shall not be lent, resold, hired out or otherwise disposed of in a mutilated condition, or in any unauthorised cover by way of Trade; or affixed to or as part of any publication or advertising, literary or pictorial matter whatsoever.

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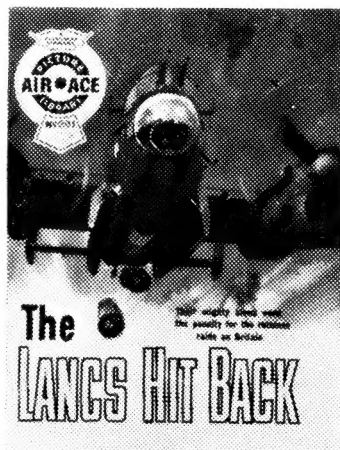
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